

PARTNER SCHOOL EXCHANGE

– helping young people grow through meaningful encounters



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1 – Welcome and background

Hi there!

Welcome to the Star for Life Partner School exchange, a unique opportunity for schools to partner with other schools in the Star for Life group.

Building partnerships between schools in Star for Life International is not only fun, but also one of the most important investments for our students and future citizens. By meeting other cultures and sharing ideas and experiences, both knowledge and understanding develop in a way that can never be achieved in the classroom alone. An international exchange opens doors to new perspectives, strengthens global awareness and creates friendships. It is an adventure that provides valuable lessons for life and builds bridges between young people from different parts of the world.

What is the Partner School Exchange?

The Partner School Exchange is a cross-cultural exchange which gives schools in the Star for Life group an opportunity to partner with each other and provides a platform for sharing skills, ideas, knowledge, information, successes, and challenges amongst learners, coaches and educators from different countries. The exchange promotes cultural understanding whilst at the same time consolidating the ideas and concepts discussed in the SFL programme.

Background

In an increasingly global yet segregated world, young people benefit from knowledge and understanding about living conditions in different parts of the world. School exchange projects have long been a way of cultivating this. The aim of the partner school Exchange is to offer students, coaches and educators the opportunity for cultural exchange, to learn about a new country and get to know its people. However, what is unique is that all who participate have experience of the Star for Life programme. By working on the themes of the programme with students from another country, previous learning is consolidated and new perspectives gained.

Realising the opportunities this exchange could offer, we initiated a two-year pilot project between two schools in Sweden and two in Namibia. Coaches, teachers and staff from Star for Life and Motivationslyftet worked together to design the pilot, which was implemented between 2021 and 2023. The experience was positive and in September 2023 we met in Sweden to evaluate the pilot and to address challenges which had arisen. The results of a survey mapping learner feedback on the project were also taken into consideration. This manual is a result of that pilot.

Who can participate?

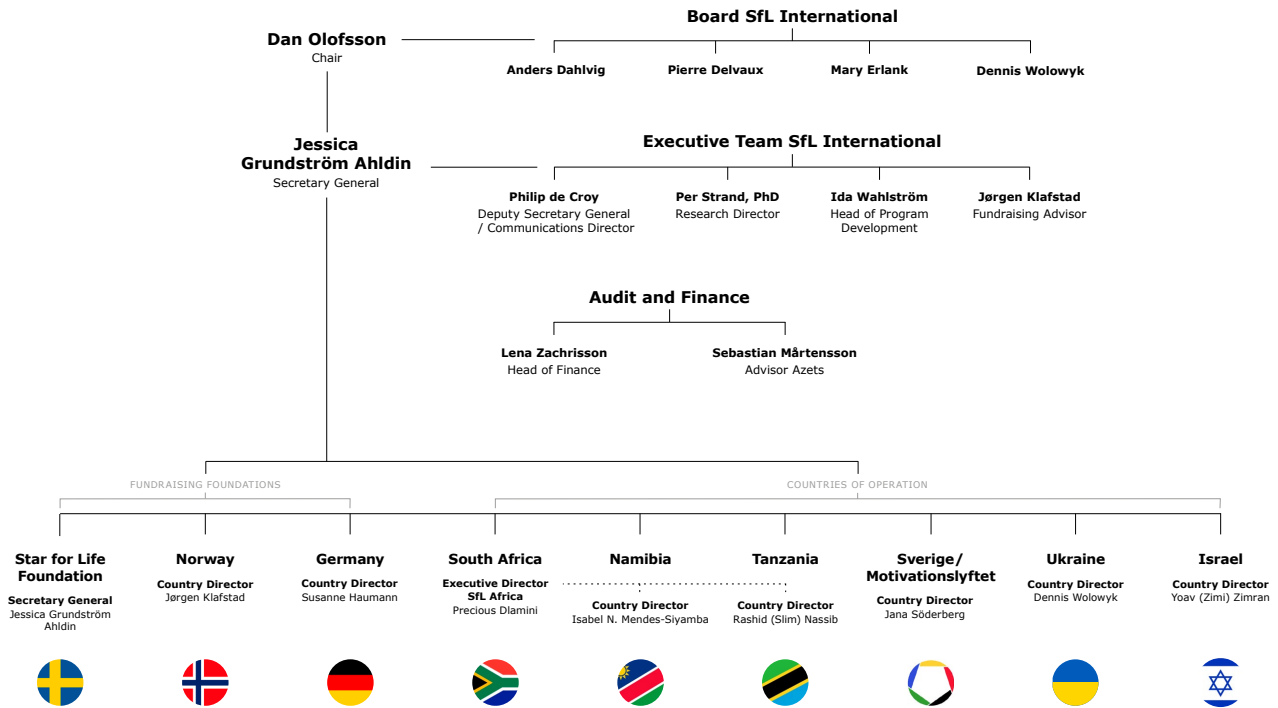
All schools working within the Star for Life International programme are welcome to participate.

Although the implementation of the programme differs between countries, the foundation is the same - that of equipping young people with tools to strengthen their self-esteem, stay motivated in school and make wise-life decisions. With this in mind we welcome any school presently in the Star for Life programme to apply for partnership in the Partner School Exchange.

Star for Life International

Star for Life was founded in a school in South Africa in 2005 but has since grown into an international collaboration of legally independent organizations that share values, skills and concepts. Today we are present in 63 schools in South Africa, 19 schools in Namibia, 8 schools in Tanzania, 3 IT schools in Ukraine and 10 schools in Jerusalem. Under the name Motivationslyftet we are also present in 70 schools around Sweden. Every year, about 65,000 students encounter Star for Life’s work in their classrooms and since the start, 500,000 students have gone through our entire programme.

SfL International



2 – Aims of the Exchange

The Partner School Exchange has a three tiered approach, offering opportunities for students, coaches and teachers. Let's take a look at what's in it for these three groups.

Students

Through the exchange the students will

- participate in exercises from the SFL/ ML programme with their partner school, encouraging them to reflect on personal values, study motivation, health, etc.
- get the chance to communicate with other young people from a different culture.
- improve their English language skills by using English as the language of communication.
- benefit from knowing that they are part of a larger international group of schools using the same programme.

Coaches

The exchange provides many new opportunities for the coach, both on a professional and a personal level. Coaches will get the chance to

- take part in a cultural exchange which will inspire and motivate them in their work
- work with colleagues from another culture, allowing them to develop in the capacity of coach but also as professionals in a wider context.
- have a 'coach buddy' someone with whom they can discuss implementation of the programme - sharing successes and challenges and building up their bank of ideas and exercises
- be a 'bridge builder' between our organizations and spawn creative ideas which can enhance and further develop our programs

Teachers

Teachers participating in the exchange will be given the opportunity to

- embark on an exciting cross-cultural exchange with their students.
- swap ideas with colleagues in other countries and gain insight into another education system.
- take part in digital training courses in neuro-leadership.

3 – How does it work?

The partnership is built on the shared experience of the SFL programme and communication is based on the themes dealt with in the various modules. Although the exchange allows for a certain degree of flexibility we have put together some guidelines based on the pilot project. We also provide sample lesson plans to help you understand how you can explore the themes in the programme with your partner school.

Themes

Many relevant issues are dealt with in the SFL programme but we have chosen three main themes under which you can structure your workshops and exercises.

1) Culture (Jan – Feb)

In this theme the students will get to know each other and introduce their school and their country. They might also discuss hobbies and what they do in their spare time.

2) Health (March – May)

Health is such a vital theme for young people and here you are free to work on issues which are relevant to both groups. These might include diet and exercise, mental health, sexual health, use of cell phones and social media etc.

3) Motivation (August – October)

The last section of the project should leave the students feeling empowered and motivated to reach their goals both in school and in life. Here they need to be reminded about having concrete goals, planning their time to achieve those goals, how to cope with failure etc

The school year

Due to major differences in the school year between the various countries, work on the exchange has to be concentrated to certain months. For instance, during June, July and half of August Swedish schools have their long summer break so no work can be carried out then. The same applies to November and December in southern Africa when exams take place and the learners leave for the Christmas break. In Sweden the school year begins in August, whereas in Southern Africa it begins in January. This is a challenge but we suggest that you start work on the project in January.

Age of students

When choosing classes to participate in the project there are things you will need to consider. These will vary depending on your individual situation but we advise you not to choose classes which will be preparing for final exams. Our recommendation is for grades 7-8 and 10-11.

Duration of the exchange

The duration of the exchange is flexible; if successfully implemented it can be an enriching experience for your school for many years to come. This will vary from case to case but the minimum period for participation is one year.

Connectivity

As most of your communication will be online you will need to have reasonably reliable internet connectivity at your school.

4 – Becoming a partner school and getting started

The process of setting up your partnership is explained below but before we start it is important to know that for a project to start in January you will need to carry out the planning stage between September and December the previous year.

- 1) You fill in the questionnaire for partner schools and consider the questions carefully. This should then be signed by the principal and member of staff responsible for the project and then sent to the project coordinators, Helena and Lois, who will guide you through the process.
- 2) The coordinators arrange a meeting with the principal and the Star for Life coach in order to make sure schools understand the exchange.
- 3) After having read through your questionnaire the coordinator will attempt to match you with a school in the country of your choice. **This might take some time.** You will be given the name of the school and the necessary contact details. The coordinator will send a letter of welcome to the school principal.
- 4) The project coordinators will arrange a meeting for principals/responsible teachers and coaches. This will allow all those involved to introduce themselves, to discuss expectations and to exchange all necessary contact details needed to ensure easy communication. This initial meeting is extremely important and it is essential that the teachers and coaches who will be responsible for the exchange are present. Allow at least one hour for this.
- 5) After this meeting it is important that you (coaches/ teachers) make contact as soon as possible in order to discuss how frequently you will communicate, what your focus/themes will be and the type of learner group involved. This initial contact is paramount in ensuring a smooth start to your partnership so please do not delay in doing this or in replying to mails from your partner school. If, for some reason, you cannot make contact or do not receive a reply from the other school please inform the coordinator. Your initial contact will be a letter of introduction where you present yourself, your class and your school. After this there are a number of points which need to be addressed:
 - a) **Discuss term dates with your partner school.** This is important so that you have a realistic view of how much time you actually have for the exchange.
 - b) **How many times a term/year will you correspond?** Three to four times a year is probably suitable but you are free to decide this with your partner. Remember to leave enough time for your group to work on the topics. When you have come to an agreement you should decide on dates when you will communicate with your partner school.
 - c) **What will the focus/theme of your communication be?** This will depend on the age and interests of your group and might involve writing, discussion, filming, etc.

6) This period of planning might take some weeks which is why it is important that you begin immediately.

7) When this is 'ready to go' and can start working on the agreed assignment with your group. Do not be too ambitious because, as we all know, things always take longer than planned.

8) If you know that you are not going to be able to stick to the agreed deadline please communicate this to your partners and renegotiate a new date. If unexpected questions, ideas or problems arise whilst you are working on the assignment do not hesitate to contact your partner school – open and frequent communication is the key to a successful partnership! And remember that the project coordinator is there to help you too.

We wish you all the best in your partnership!



5 – Voices from the exchange

Here's what learners and coaches had to say at the end of the pilot project:

'I really enjoyed it. It's so nice being in a partnership with learners. You get to know about their country and other things.'

'I enjoy learning about foreign cultures and traditions. It helps me grow as a person and helps me to understand other people better.'

'I'm enjoying the interaction between us and the Swedish learners. It's fun to see what they think and what they do at school or in their free time.'

Some feedback from coaches/teachers too:

- 60% said that the exchange had helped them understand the SFL programme better
- 55% said that SFL felt more exciting now that they know it is an international programme

Has the project been valuable for you as a teacher?

'The project has been valuable to me as a teacher. I have gotten to know teachers in Namibia and gained insight into their daily lives and the challenges they face, but I have also realized that we share a lot.'

Has the project been valuable for the learners?

'Absolutely. They have met new friends and gained an understanding that not all learners have the same possibilities. They have also learnt that many questions are the same regardless of where you live.'

What has been positive?

'Getting to know people from another culture, the conversations, and the willingness to share a project together.'

6 – Suggested ways of working

There are several ways of working on the exchange and you can decide what works best for you. You can carry out the lessons separately and send material to each other, or you carry out the work beforehand and then meet to discuss insights and conclusions. If possible, you can also agree on a day and time when you meet via link in real time and carry out exercises together.

Here are some suggestions on how to create great exchange opportunities, but the list could be made long:

- Record films and send to each other based on a given theme
- Read a joint article beforehand and then meet and discuss the content
- Write poems and send to each other
- Do something creative together
- Write letters freely or based on a given theme
- Carry out an exercise and then meet to share thoughts and insights

The following lesson plans are in no way prescriptive but are examples of themes you can work on with your partners. The themes for the lessons were agreed on by the teachers before the work started. The lessons were conducted via a link so that the students could meet each other and sometimes films were also sent between the schools in advance. To ensure that technology would not get in the way of the work, filming was done with mobile phones which worked perfectly.

Overview and suggested themes

January – March	April – June	August– October
CULTURE	HEALTH	MOTIVATION
<p>Introduction and presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of our school and our culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School system Our school Typical food Hobbies Famous people 	<p>The importance of health for well-being and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Ability to make decisions • Self- esteem/self- confidence • Belief in the future 	<p>Inner drive och achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation – Inspiration and commitment • Study techniques • Goals and dreams • Role models

THEME 1: Culture

Purpose

This exercise allows the students to get to know each other a little by learning about each other's schools and about the cultures of the different countries. The exercise also aims to introduce the students to the exchange and will require approximately four lessons in total.

Each class records short videos with the following suggested content:

Film 1 – Presentation

The class introduces itself, showing the classroom and the school.

Film 2 – School

The students present their school – what a typical school day looks like, how often they have tests and homework, and anything else they want to tell about their school.

Film 3 – Food

Here you can show pictures or make a recording of how to cook a typical meal. The students can show what a weekly menu might look like if one exists.

Film 4 – Leisure

Tell us what activities young people do in their free time. Maybe film an activity.

Film 5 – Famous People

Tell us about famous people in the country. Show pictures of them and explain why they are famous. Could be prime minister, sportsmen, artists, activists etc.

Comment

Students usually find it exciting to talk about the differences that exist, but encourage them to focus on what is the same and what we have in common.

Implementation

A suggested structure for this theme could look like this:

Lesson 1

The teacher/coach presents the exchange, explaining its purpose. In groups, the students prepare the content for the films.

Lesson 2

The students film in small groups based on given topics. After this lesson, the films are sent to the partner school.

Lesson 3

Exchange: The students watch each other's films, discuss and write down questions. The questions can be sent to each school in advance, so that the students can prepare answers.

Lesson 4

Exchange: Book a meeting with the partner school. During this lesson, discussions are held based on the films and the questions that came up.



THEME 2: Health

Understanding the importance of health for our well-being and our ability to learn at school is important for young people. Within this theme, there are many opportunities to select and focus on issues that are relevant to both groups. For example, these could be about diet and exercise, mental health, sexual health, self-esteem/self-confidence, use of mobile phones and social media. The aim is to gain increased knowledge about holistic health and to gain insights into the importance of making conscious decisions and sustainable choices about health.

Purpose

Here is a suggestion for an exercise related to self-esteem and self-confidence. The aim is to give students a greater understanding of the difference between these two, gain knowledge about how to strengthen them and understand the importance of finding a balance between self-esteem and self-confidence in order to feel good.

Self-esteem – what we are

Self-confidence – what we do

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is about how I feel and think about myself – how I see myself as a person with both strengths and weaknesses. It can vary and depends on situations and people around me. When I have stable self-esteem, I feel that I am good just as I am and I dare to be myself. Even though I do not always do the right thing I feel that I am capable, I dare to make decisions that are good for me, dare to ask for help and dare to speak up and stand for my opinion. Self-esteem grows in an environment where we feel liked and needed.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is about my confidence in being able to complete tasks and perform in different situations and contexts. Self-confidence can vary from day to day and is strengthened, for example, when I receive confirmation that I have done something well. So, you can have different degrees of self-confidence in different areas, for example, you can have high self-confidence in school but poor self-confidence in private when it comes to social relationships, dancing or cooking.

We feel best if there is a balance between our self-esteem and our self-confidence. Self-esteem and self-confidence are 'perishable goods' and need to be maintained throughout life.



Implementation

1. Introduce the lesson by clarifying the difference between self-esteem and self-confidence for the students. Feel free to use the fact box above.

2. Ask the students to discuss the following questions in small groups:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of defining ourselves by our achievements?
- Based on the difference between self-esteem and self-confidence: What happens if we do not perform as we planned or even fail?
- Based on the difference between self-esteem and self-confidence: What happens if we receive criticism for what we have done?

3. Summarize the discussions and let the students discuss the situations below together in their groups. Start with the following example to clarify the task:

Example: A friend criticizes you for not answering a text message. What do you do?

Suggested solution: Instead of getting defensive or counterattacking and saying something like “You usually do the same,” you can answer “Yes, it was wrong of me not to answer, sorry.”

Conclusion: If you are confident in yourself (and in your relationship) you can more easily distinguish between who you ARE and what you DID.

Examples of two situations that students can discuss:

- Exams at school: You want a high grade on your exam but get a lower grade than you were aiming for. How should you reason so as not to lose all motivation, but instead learn for the next exam and the future? How is this connected to self-esteem and self-confidence?
- Sports: You have trained hard but are not selected for the game on Saturday. What happens to your self-confidence and self-esteem? Give each other tips on how to think so as not to lose motivation, but instead learn for next time.

4. The students then carry out the exercise on self-confidence and self-esteem, where they should fill in the thought bubbles individually. See worksheet below.

5. Exchange

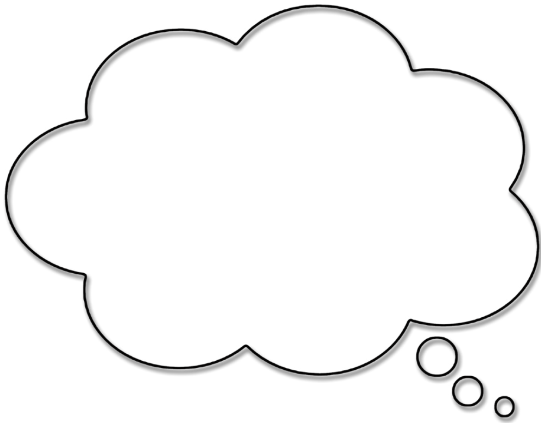
Summarize the group discussions together and give each other tips on how to find the balance between self-esteem and self-confidence. Then send the summary to the partner school and ask them to send theirs. When the students have read each other’s summaries, write comments or questions together in class or in small groups which are then sent back. If possible, you can also meet digitally or record your thoughts in a short film.

Worksheet

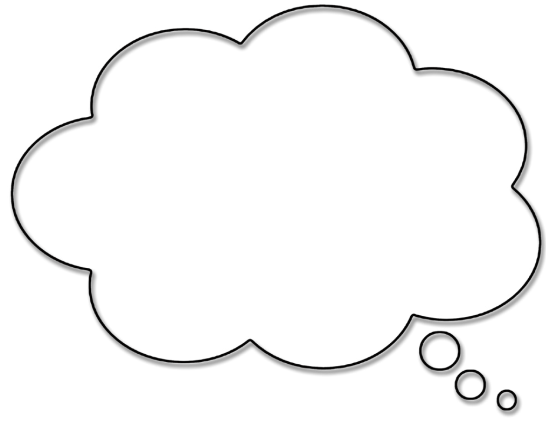
Name: _____

Self-confidence

I am proud that I can:

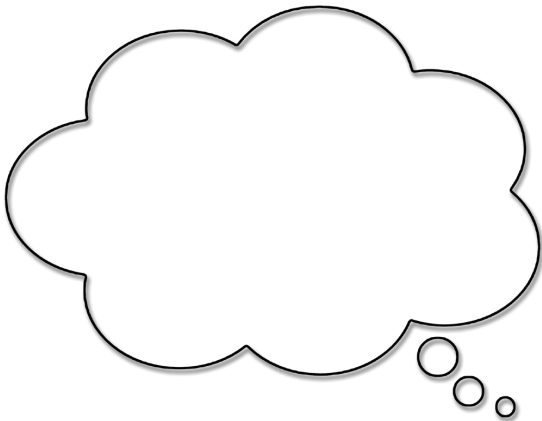


I need to practise to be better at:

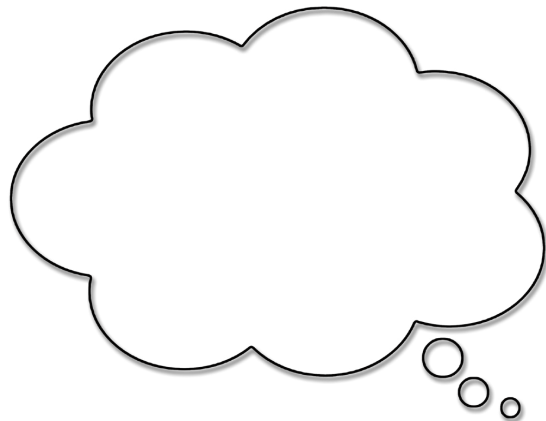


Self-esteem

I am proud that I am:



This is something I need to work on:



THEME 3: Motivation

What inspires, engages and motivates you?

We are affected by everything and everyone around us, both positively and negatively. It is important to find out what and who gives us energy and inspiration so that we can use it when we need it most. When we are inspired, it helps us find and maintain our commitment and continue to fight towards our goals.

EXERCISE 1

Purpose

The aim of this exercise is for students to find out what inspires them so that they can replenish their motivation when they need it.

Implementation

1. Draw a sun on the board. Tell them that it is an “inspiration sun”. In small groups the students come up with different suggestions for things that inspire and give them energy, for example events, music, people and activities. Each suggestion is represented by a ray of sunshine.
2. Now let the students fill in their own sun on a piece of paper, where they can be more specific and give examples of what inspires them.
3. **Exchange:** Send the group sun or the students’ individual suns to the partner school who can then read and compare with their own. Let them comment and ask each other questions, based on inspiration and things that make them feel good. After that, depending on how much time is available, they can give feedback to the partner school through a conversation during a shared lesson, a film or by mail



Brain breaks

When studying or learning our brains sometimes need a break.

Brain breaks are short breaks in the lesson where you use your brain in a completely different way, for example through rhythmic exercises. It is fun to let the students give each other tips on how brain breaks can create new energy and inspiration to use during the rest of the lesson and the school day. Let the students give each other tips on fun brain breaks!



EXERCISE 2

Music activates our brain and affects how we feel

Music gives us wonderful experiences and affects how we feel. Research* shows that when you play or sing, the whole brain is activated and new nerve pathways in the brain are opened. Young people who play music have better concentration and working memory than those who don't. These abilities can in turn lead to increased motivation for their schoolwork.

We don't have to sing or play an instrument ourselves, just listening to music has a positive effect on us. Music releases emotions that can help us in different situations. Energetic music can motivate us and calm music can help us relax.

*Examples of research on this:



Music activates the whole brain

- Stefan Koelsch – A leading researcher in music psychology and neuroscience, known for his studies on how music affects the emotional and cognitive functions of the brain.
- Chelsea L. Gordon et al. – Conducted a meta-analysis of fMRI studies that showed that listening to music activates motor brain regions, even without physical movement.



Music improves concentration and working memory.

- Shirin Taheri et al. (2022) – Study that showed that background music improved working memory in participants, with increased accuracy and faster response times.
- Kate A. Yurgil et al. (2020) – Review article linking music training to improvements in working memory and the brain's neural oscillations.
- Ingo Roden et al. (2014) – Longitudinal study that showed that children with music training had better working memory skills than the control group.



Music positively affects our emotional lives

- Iris Mauss – Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, is known for her research on emotion regulation and emotional well-being.

Purpose

This exercise aims to give students increased knowledge that music can be used as inspiration, but also as a tool to influence us on many different levels.

Implementation

1. Play a song or piece of music and ask students to describe what feeling it conveys. It can be one of your own favorite songs. Feel free to tell us what it means to you and why it inspires you.

2. Write these questions on the board and let the students think about them individually for a minute.

What music do you listen to?

Do you listen to particular music on certain occasions?

Do you consciously use music to achieve a certain feeling? Give examples.

3. Let the students make two song lists:

1. The class song list with songs that cheer them up! You can use this in different lessons when the students need a little extra pep, for example before a test.
2. The class song list with calm songs, which you can use when they need peace and quiet.

Different lists for different feelings. These lists can also be made like a sun, where the students' choice of songs make up the sun's rays. The feeling/title is written in the middle of the sun.

4. Exchange:

Send the lists to your partner school and compare the differences and similarities. If you want, the students can choose 2-3 songs that they like best on the other school's list and tell them why.

If possible, meet online so that the students can share their thoughts. The discussion can be based on the following questions:

- How big a role does music play in your life?
- In what ways is music present in your everyday life?
- *How can we use music in a concrete way to create motivation and inspiration?

We would like to express our gratitude to coaches and teachers at the schools who took part in the pilot project:

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Christinaskolan, Lidingö

Eldorado Secondary School, Windhoek

JG van Der Wath Secondary School, Okahandja

Thank you for fun, friendship and learning throughout the process.

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Building partnerships between schools in Star for Life International is not only fun, but also one of the most important investments for our students and future citizens. By meeting other cultures and sharing ideas and experiences, both knowledge and understanding develop in a way that can never be achieved in the classroom alone. An international exchange opens doors to new perspectives, strengthens global awareness and creates friendships. It is an adventure that provides valuable lessons for life and builds bridges between young people from different parts of the world.

This manual provides schools with support and ideas for your partner school exchange. It contains a general description of the aim of the work, as well as concrete suggestions for themes to gather around, working methods and exercises.

We wish you all the best in your partnership!

